

Obesity Costs Billions Annually; Grocers Encouraged to Help

By Sonia Kuar

A new report released in April by the California Department of Health Services shows that physical inactivity, obesity, and overweight costs California \$21.7 billion a year in direct and indirect medical care, workers' compensation, and lost productivity. We don't have figures for the rest of the nation, but it's a good bet that the statistics in other states are just as staggering.

Most of these costs are shouldered by public and private employers who sponsor health insurance for their workers. An unhealthy workforce, including store employees, merchandisers, drivers, and others in the food industry, can lead to higher insurance costs and increased workers' compensation claims, sick leave, and absenteeism. The associated costs are expected to rise unless aggressive action is taken.

According to Dr. Richard J. Jackson, California State Public Health Officer, "These costs are much higher than expected and reveal that the price of the obesity epidemic is far greater for businesses, as well as communities and individuals, than was previously realized. The new numbers should convince many more stakeholders to pitch in and help fix the problem so healthy eating and physical activity become the easy, routine choices for all Californians."

Members of the food industry play a vital

role in improving public health, both for their own employees and their customers. As employers and as retailers, they can be part of the solution, as well.

One way retail grocers can get involved is by encouraging shoppers, as well as their employees, to consume at least 5 servings of fruits and vegetables every day, and engage in daily physical activity for better health. Highlighting

selections of foods that are "portable" and easily taken to school or work is a great way to facilitate healthier mid-day meals.

Snackable produce presents an added sales opportunity. Retailers can hold contests for the best snack ideas; sample great

snack items; remind their shoppers about grab-n-go foods with eye-catching signage; and work with their local PBH/5 A Day retail team to promote items that can be eaten by active adults and children.

The California 5 a Day Retail Program has materials in English and in Spanish that are free to qualified retailers, which educate consumers about the benefits of produce and can help stimulate sales and healthier lifestyles. For more information, contact Sonia Kuar at 916-449-5417. To view samples of the California 5 a Day Retail Program materials that are available, visit www.ca5aday.com/retail.



Focus on California 5 A Day